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GOVERNMENTAL RESTRICTIONS ON BURMESE BUSINESSMEN

Comment: Feature writers in the independent and influential Hanthawaddy appear to be distressed by government restrictions on Burmese businessmen. One writer, under the pseudonym of Datsi (meaning Gasoline), traces the history of increasing governmental interference and financial pressure on businessmen since independence. In the same issue of the paper, Maung Dana, writer of a regular twice-weekly column "Economics," decries the passport limitations imposed on Burmese merchants engaged in foreign travel.⁷

Noting that the Ministry of Commerce, now headed by Thakin Tha Khin, is about to conduct another investigation of shareholders and shares in public and private companies, Datsi expressed the hope that the Ministry really have a good purpose in mind this time in view of the fact that the businessmen are exhausted by such investigations, having already undergone one within the last 6 months.

Datsi seems even more concerned about financial difficulties created by governmental interference. He illustrates the burden on importers by figuring that they must pay over 27,000 kyats in fees, licenses, and income tax for every 100,000 kyats' worth of goods they import -- not counting overhead charges which are inflated, he says, by government specifications relative to office space, personnel, records, etc. He considers the Burmese government's flat 2 percent levy for an Open General License for importing goods to be too high.

Maung Dana objects to the delays experienced by Burmese traders because of reinvestigations by the Police Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs whenever businessmen attempt to renew their passports quickly and on short notice, as is often required by the nature of their commercial activities abroad. The present situation, under which the 5-year passport is usable only one time and renewable only with much difficulty, is considered unsatisfactory.

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